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THE RIGHTS OF SMALL NATIONS IN AMERICA

THE REPUBLICS OF THE CARIBBEAN

BY OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD,

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In his recent address to Congress, which led to the declaration of war against Germany, Woodrow Wilson declared that

peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and freedom of nations can make them.

With these sentiments as a declaration of national policy, every American must agree, whatever may be his feelings as to the present war and the necessity thereof. For the line of conduct the President has thus laid down in these beautiful phrases is the one which the United States should surely follow in all its dealings with any of the nations with which we are brought into contact. They are particularly apropos at this time, when we are entering into closer and closer relations in dealing with the republics to the south of us. Just because they are so weak as compared with our own giant strength it is necessary that we should base our policy towards them upon the highest ethical and moral standards, coupled with true unselfishness and without any thoughts as to personal profit for the United States because of our philanthropic action.

The very highmindedness of this statement of Mr. Wilson's makes this an opportune moment to inquire whether in our dealings with certain islands in the West Indies we are maintaining his standards and ideals. It makes it possible for me to enter a plea before you for the need of an even more detailed declaration of American policy than this towards those republics in the Caribbean whose governments are now under American military control. Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti and San Domingo are today under American tutelage or controlled by governments upheld by American bayonets. But I shall deal in this paper only with the situation in the sister republics of Haiti and San Domingo. Of these, the latter, after an independent existence as a republic of seventy-two years,

has been taken over by force by our government; while of the independent government of Haiti—a negro republic of 112 years' standing, during which time no foreigner was ever attacked or injured, no white woman ever assaulted, and no legation ever violated save once—only a toppling shell of a government, which may crumble at any moment, remains. My appeal is for a definite declaration of intention as to these and the other republics, because there could be no more fitting time than this, when the United States is entering the world war for the avowed purpose of driving out despotism, crushing autocracy and upholding the rights of smaller nations, and because one is vitally needed, if we are to hold the full confidence and friendship of Latin America.

What are we going to do to the smaller nations in the Caribbean, whom we are one by one taking over, because their governmental methods and results do not appeal to us? Plainly, we are drifting there. Our influence is extending rapidly by the acts of both the dominating political parties, and yet nothing is being done by reason of a deliberate national consciousness or a declared policy. In neither of the last political platforms is there any statement of a belief that the United States should go on deliberately extending its influence in the Caribbean, or any reference whatever to Haiti and San Domingo. If this is manifest destiny, it is an extraordinarily voiceless destiny. If it is an unconscious national drift, it has all the foreboding and the terrifying silence of an irresistible glacier. The American electorate has never voted upon it. It has alternately applauded the "taking" by force and trickery of Panama and the violation of a treaty with a small nation with which we were at peace, and the Mobile speech of President Wilson, in which he declared to the sister republics to the south of us that:

"I want to take this occasion to say, too, that the United States will not again seek to secure one additional foot of territory by conquest."

In his dealing with the sorely tried Republic of Mexico he nobly lived up to this doctrine, despite the bloody blunder of Vera Cruz. On the other hand, we have just witnessed the purchase of the Danish West Indies, at a fabulous price, "additional territory" to the south of us, without its calling for any noteworthy comment in press or public or in Congress, either for or against the proposal. Forgotten is the wonderful fight made by Sumner in opposition to

the treaty urged by President Grant for the annexation of San Domingo at the bargain price of \$1,500,000—the cost of islands having risen with the price of living. With Mr. Wilson the deciding argument for the purchase of the Danish Islands was reported to be the belief that, if we did not purchase them at once, Germany would—even in the midst of an overwhelming war—which recalls the fact that when Grant was balked of his desire to get hold of San Domingo, he declared: “If we abandon the project, I now firmly believe that a free port will be negotiated for by European nations in the Bay of Samana.”

President Grant made even more specific the spectre of foreign aggrandizement, which has done duty so often, together with the threat of a supposedly impending violation of the Monroe Doctrine, to take us a step farther along the highway imperialistic, by asserting to the Senate: “I have information which I believe reliable that a European power stands ready now to offer \$2,000,000 for the possession of Samana Bay alone, if refused by us.” But that was in 1870, and we had not yet reached that stage in our congressional development when it has apparently become a party duty to vote what the President asks, without regard to individual opinion or conscience, and so Sumner won on the merits of the argument, precisely as Seward was beaten overwhelmingly in 1867, when he advocated the purchase of the Danish West Indies for \$7,500,000.

Times have changed; so we took over the administration of the San Domingan customs houses in 1907 by treaty, solely in order to get her out of debt and to prevent revolutions by safeguarding the customs-house receipts, which were the chief booty of the periodic revolvers. At first it seemed to work well, but then revolutions began again and it was openly said that the trouble was that we had not taken for ourselves power enough. Next, a treaty was forced upon this unwilling people, by shutting off of their revenues, and thus compelling them to surrender to us their last shred of independence. When the government fell by reason of inanition, we placed a naval dictator in charge in the person of Captain Harry S. Knapp, who began his reign in the name of the American democracy by suppressing some of the native newspapers which criticised our acts and by installing a censorship all his own that forbade even the newspapers in the United States to receive a single word that was not edited by himself. This autocratic ruling lasted only until

the press of this country laid the facts before Secretary Daniels when the order was promptly revoked. But the native newspapers, with one exception, the *Listin Diario*, having no one to speak for them in the seats of the mighty, are reported to have "stayed dead." Captain Knapp's cabinet consists of naval officers and marine officers, and there is no congress, no free press, no effective force to hold him in check. Foreigners are gobbling up the best of the cane lands.

In Haiti we have forced a convention on a free people by giving them their choice between a treaty surrendering to the United States the collection and disbursement of their customs receipts, and the creation and control of a constabulary. Having signed the convention, we then imposed upon them a military occupation, having refrained from paying the interest on their foreign and domestic loans while using \$95,000 a month of their income to pay the costs of our occupation, which the Haitian people detest, particularly our rigid martial law. It is only just to say that this policy was entered upon by our State Department with real intent to be of service, because it felt that the country was in chaos and anarchy, and that the foreign bondholders, through their governments, would soon insist that either the United States should make order in the republic or let some outsider do it. I am not here to impugn motives, but merely to record facts, and the fact is that the government and the people of Haiti, who always paid the interest on their foreign loans, are now on the point of bankruptcy and their government is on the verge of being broken down by us, while the Washington authorities delay the payment of interest on all loans and the refunding of the total indebtedness, which, despite years of revolution, is only \$32,000,000. They take pride, and justly so, that our marine officers have created a splendid gendarmerie of sixteen hundred men, have built and repaired a number of roads, and given the peasantry a sense of security which has not been theirs for years. If there was chaos, that is at an end, and there is that much clear gain.

But granting, for the sake of argument, all that may be urged as to the necessity of our intervening in these two republics, what then? Are we sailing by any chart? What course have we laid out? Is there any definite governmental aim? If so, it has not been stated. Neither the Republican nor Democratic platforms of 1916, I repeat, made the slightest reference to either republic or our rela-

tions to them. Is there any social or educational survey of the republics on foot? None. Is there any recognition of the necessity of differentiating between the Haitians, who are French in culture, and the San Dominigans, who are Spanish in culture? A proposal to send an American commission to Haiti privately financed was spurned a year ago by the State Department as likely to hurt the Haitian feelings if it should undertake a study of the underlying economic and social causes of the unrest of the past—those feelings, which, we are told, were in nowise disturbed when we forced the surrender treaty upon them! There is no definite national declaration as to how long we shall stay, how often we shall renew the treaties, or whether we shall ever let go. Neither President nor Congress has spoken on this point, nor as to whether we hitherto non-militaristic Americans should or should not govern these countries by military officials. If they are to be militarily governed, then by what branch of the service? Porto Rico and the Philippines are under the War Department; the other nations in our tutelage are under the navy. The Bureau of Insular Affairs is not yet trusted with the Virgin Islands; until the war permits a more leisurely arrangement, they are to be governed by an admiral on a makeshift basis.

All question of a serious taking of stock is deferred. We shall not know just how much of industrial bankruptcy and depression and human backwardness we have purchased in the Virgin Islands until peace returns. And then? Then it will surely be time to exalt the whole question of the government of our permanent and temporary wards of whom the bulk of our people are so ignorant, to a position in which it shall have the attention it needs and deserves. But how shall it be done? It is not merely a question of deciding whether the islands are to have military or civilian government; whether we shall not follow the example of England in Egypt in letting the natives carry on their own government under the oversight of a diplomatic agent-resident, in the manner of Cromer. It is not only a question of deciding whether Haiti and San Domingo are to be governed merely for the purpose of keeping order for a term of years and getting them out of debt, or even whether they are to be scientifically administered in order that their peoples shall really be trained in the art of self-government and be taught to walk, so that when we withdraw they shall not stumble and fall

again. Far beyond this, first and foremost of all, is the question: What is it we have in our minds and hearts for them? Are we to be guided wholly by philanthropy, by the desire to help these small nations to an independent existence, as we are praying for independence after the war for Greece, Belgium and Serbia, or is their proximity to us, the wealth of their remarkable economic resources and their trade relationship to us, to give to our spectacles another hue as we look upon them? Shall the country remember what Mr. Wilson has said: "It is a very perilous thing to determine a foreign policy in the terms of material interest"? Shall the nation say with him: "Morality and not expediency is the thing that must guide us (in our relations with other nations), and we must never condone iniquity"—iniquity even in our own attitude and policy?

Shall the noble words of Wilson at Mobile apply only to conquest in war, or shall we make them a similar self-denying ordinance against that form of conquest which has given us practically complete control of Haiti and San Domingo, happily with but little bloodshed, but a control none the less as complete as if we had let General Pershing march to Mexico City and let him take over the whole government of Mexico. Many Americans have been killed in Mexico and much American property damaged; no such charge lay against Haitians or San Dominigans. Is the difference in our policy towards them wholly due to their difference in extent of territory? Is there to be further intervention of this sort to the south of us, dependent upon haphazard act or as the result of a well-thought-out policy? Surely, we can all agree that the vital importance of these relationships, not only as to those directly affected, but in their very great effect upon our trade and political relations with Central and South America, dictates that the administration of these wards should be in the hands of a Cabinet officer, and each dependency, temporary or permanent, represented as are Porto Rico and the Philippines by delegates to Congress. Perhaps it may be well, even, to establish a House of Colonial Delegates, in order that their special problems may profit by mutual interchange of ideas and of experiences.

Surely, some means must be devised for bringing the needs and desires of these very different peoples now under our care before the public, so that we shall not repeat in their case our nation's lamentable record in the matter of our Indian wards; so that, for instance,

when an admiral-governor suppresses a book and all the native press because he does not like the contents thereof, it shall be possible to get the facts before Congress, the government and the people. If such a one says, as one does today, that no native newspaper shall have any more right to criticize the American occupation of the island he controls than the Belgians have the right to criticize their cruel and overbearing conquerors, there should be some way of letting this be known outside the circles of officialdom, which are so apt to dismiss a question like this, even when it affects a fundamental human liberty, one expressly guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, with a brusque: "It serves the beggars right."

In other words, the question before us is whether we are really going to set ourselves down to the task of governing well, according to the highest American tradition, these peoples who have no desire whatever to be governed by us and prefer to be governed poorly by themselves so long as they may have self-government and independence rather than be governed by outsiders whose culture and point of view in every fundamental thing are so alien. Shall we in the spirit of high humanity seek to establish with complete unselfishness, true democracy in these wonderful islands of Haiti and San Domingo, as against the autocracy of despotic or military control? Shall we not live up to the words of President Wilson in his war message, that "the world must be made safe for democracy"—safe, let us hope he meant, even from Americans? Certainly, there could be no better program for our conduct in Haiti and San Domingo than the President's assertion with which I began this paper. It is of the utmost importance for our own standing before the world that the several departments of the government whose duty it is to carry out the details of our foreign policy should not only conform to the high standards set by him, but should be still further committed to them by a detailed and definite promise registered in the eyes of all the world and before high Heaven itself. Any other course would surely give "aid and comfort" to the common enemy.